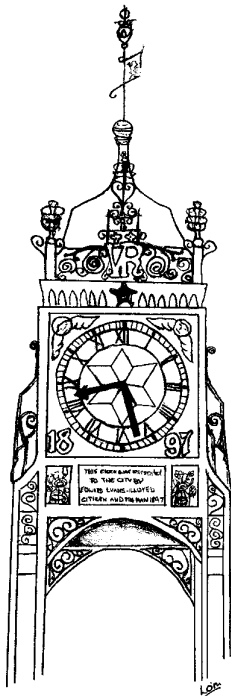


CHESTER CHRONICLES.....



EASTGATE CLOCK, CHESTER

Taxing times!

"There is never a convenient time for death, taxes or childbirth." (Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*)

I couldn't agree more with the woman. I've done the childbirth thing. Remember that baby on the ferry! That was certainly inconvenient. Now I'm up to my neck in taxes. Me—the tax office is after me. Can you believe it?

Some people in this region are earning salaries that would have kept Roy Keane in the World Cup, and yet they're coming after me! Is it me, is it something I said, something I did? Hold on a minute now though. It's probably the Jag that's done it. They've seen me driving around in the Jag—"right! Let's have him." Can they not see that the thing is held together with Hammerite paint? After my third and final total body fill and respray, the chap warned me to hold my breath for as long as I can if I'm ever in a crash, because the car is likely to disintegrate in a cloud of toxic dust!

Maybe it's pay back time after that correspondence I had with them a few years ago? Friends have always said, when it comes to the tax office, keep a low profile and don't do anything unusual, but you know me, I couldn't resist a little bit of fun. I had been claiming for the usual books and journals, and I got a standard letter back from them saying that journals were not "essential to the conduct of my duties." Well, just hold on there a minute! Do they think I'm reading these for fun? I promptly found the most disgusting, disgraceful issue of the journal I could lay my hands on. Lots of warts and discharges, ulcers and crabs, and other things best not talked about—all in glorious colour, and posted it to the tax office, pointing out that this was hardly bedtime reading! Could they possibly imagine anyone reading this stuff unless they had to, unless it was essential for the job?

I believe they were quite shaken at the local tax office. I got a carefully worded reply, indicating that they had, with some regret, reviewed the journal, and painful though it was to read, it was still not considered essential for my duties, and therefore I couldn't claim tax relief for it. So now I get the terse letter indicating that I had been selected for scrutiny! Me, who only visits the "Golden Nugget" once in a blue moon. Luckily, I do keep one completely separate bank account for any private stuff such as lecture fees, "ash cash," and the odd BUPA cheque from the rare misguided private patient who feels that the current five minute NHS waiting list is inappropriate and wants to wait at least a week to organise one through the private hospital.

Now I earn so little privately that it had never even been worth my while to engage an accountant. All that talk about TESSAs, ISAs, and index linking reminds me of lectures I used to get from renal physicians on acid-base balance and the anion gap—just spare me! My financial acumen is more "do ron ron" than Enron. So I just posted them my unadulterated bank statements, which barely made sense to me. But the figures in there are so sad that even the keenest scrutineer from the tax office won't want to be associated with them for long. Anyway, that was months ago and I haven't heard a thing since.

My friends say a spell inside didn't do Ken Dodd any harm—it gave him lots of material to do shows and surely there would be plenty of anecdotes for the Chester chronicles from doing a bit of porridge? I, of course, respond to this type of goading with the immortal words of Rhett Butler—"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn!"

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